



What is Plagiarism and What Professors Can Do About It

Alan Bailin, MLS, PhD
Axinn Library
alan.bailin@hofstra.edu
516-463-5973

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is taking someone else's ideas or words and presenting them as one's own. Nevertheless, as simple as this definition seems, actual instances of student plagiarism come in a number of different varieties. Among them are the following:

- Using someone else's paper and handing it in as one's own work.
- Taking passages from either a published work or an unpublished paper and incorporating it into one's own work without indicating that you have used someone else's words and ideas.
- Taking ideas from either a published work or an unpublished paper and incorporating it into one's own work without indicating that you have used someone else's ideas.

What Faculty Can Do About It

- Explain to students what constitutes plagiarism, and make it clear that it is a form of fraud.
- Emphasize the positive aspects of documentation. Make students aware that documenting sources is a way of putting their discussion in the context of what others have thought and written on a subject and that this contextualization is an essential part of intellectual and scientific discourse.

What Faculty Can Do About It (continued)

- Work with a reference librarian to make sure that there are sufficient resources available to students and that reference librarians are aware of what resources you want students to use.
 - If there are a limited number of relevant books that are available, it may be best to put them on two-hour reserve so that everyone has a chance to use the materials.
 - If there are specific databases, journals or Web sites that you would like students to use, inform the subject specialist librarian for your department so that he or she can let the faculty staffing the Reference Desk know. This information will help the Reference Desk provide more effective instruction.
 - If you are not sure what resources are available, contact your subject specialist and work with him or her to develop a list of useful sources. This will make the research seem less daunting. If students perceive research as a task they can do well, they are more likely to do it well.
- Consider using the library's instructional services. Our assessment research shows that the more library research instruction students have, the more likely they are to understand the basic concepts. If you are concerned with the session being a simple repetition of previous instruction, talk with the library subject specialist for your department about ways of tailoring the instruction to the specific needs of your class.
- Use Turnitin not only as a means for detecting when students have plagiarized but also as a way of letting students identify documentation issues. Emphasize learning rather than punishment.

If you have questions or would like to explore these issues at greater length, feel free to email alan.bailin@hofstra.edu or call 516-463-5973.